〈詠の二十六〉

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無限の住人
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沙村広明
講談社

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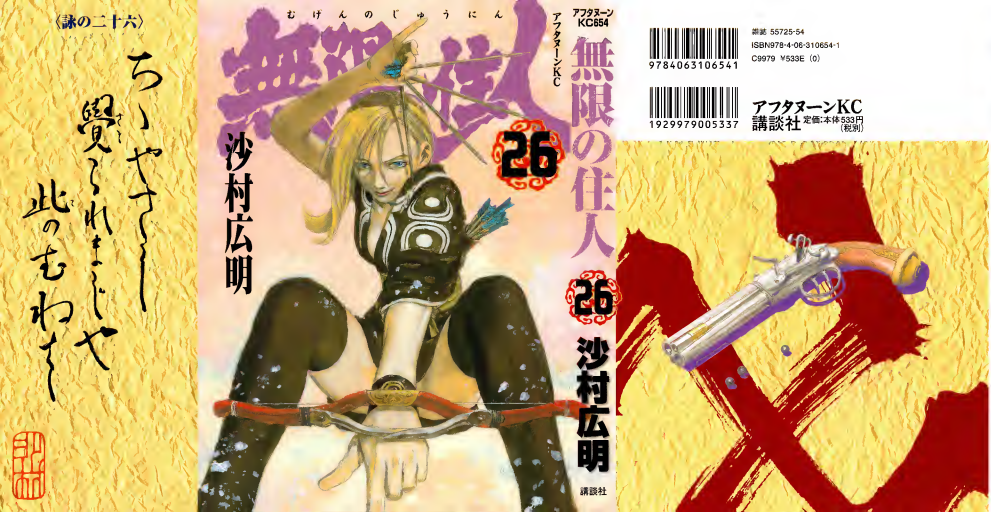

これは昔、ホームページとやらを作ろうと思っていたときにトップページに使うつもりで描いた絵です。
当時、結が勤めていた会社の上司さんが
「無限の住人」を読んでくれてた縁で、
その人にお願いする予定でした。
「周囲ムードの明るい絵ができたぜ!」と
満足して帰ったら
「…なんてこんなシャブ中患者みたいな目してんの?」と
言われました。
せめて梅図っぽくて「マッシュルーム中毒患者」と
言ってほしかったです。

hiro@ki samura

むげんのじゅうにん

無限の住人

26

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無限の住人
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無限の住人

沙村広明

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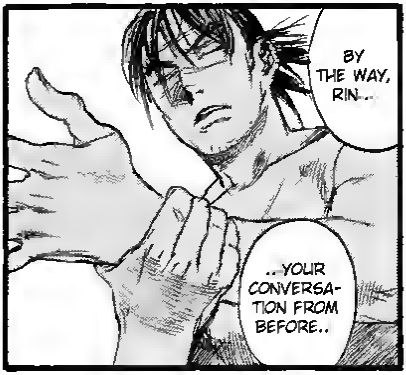
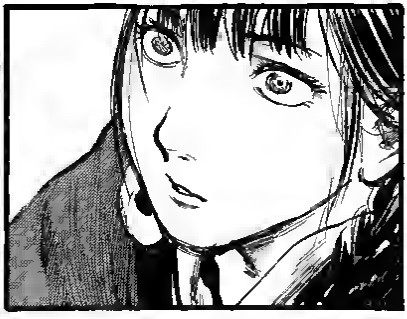
3 Dew on Spiderwebs ❖ Chapter 170

❖ Chapter 170: ❖
Dew on Spiderwebs

YOU SEEM TO BE WELL AGAIN.
I HAVE FULL POSSESSION OF MY STRENGTH AGAIN
YEAH!

YOU REALLY PUT UP A FUSS...
...WHILE I WAS UNCONSCIOUS.


BY THE WAY, RIN..
..YOUR CONVERSATION FROM BEFORE..

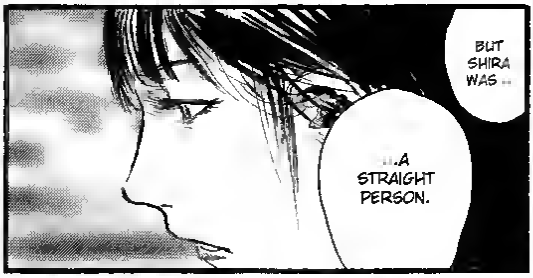


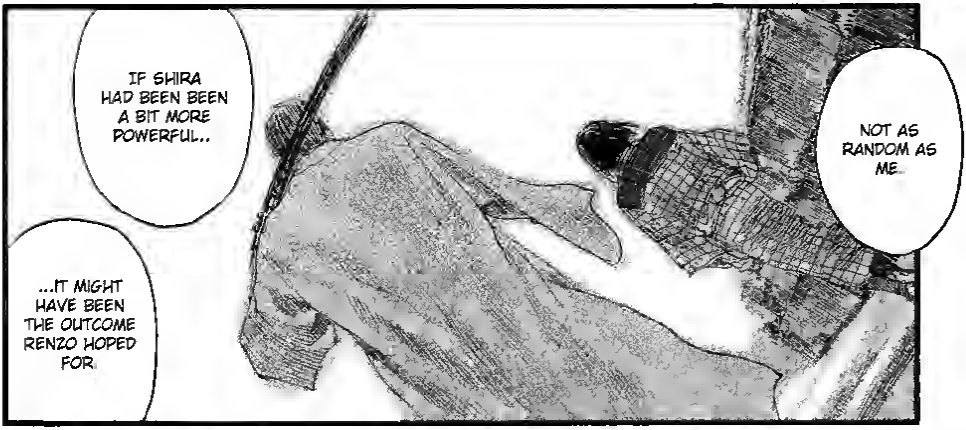
YES.
I KNOW.
IT WAS RIDICULOUS.
AT THE MOMENT...
BUT I HAD NO CHOICE.
...I CAN'T DO ANYTHING...
...FOR THE BOY.

IF I'D MOVE BACK TO EDO...
...I WOULD BE ABLE TO HELP HIM SOMEHOW.
I WOULD EVEN BE WILLING TO RAISE HIM UP.
BUT...
...THAT WON'T BE POSSIBLE NOW.
ALL I CAN DO FOR HIM AT THE MOMENT, IS...
..FOOL HIM WITH DIRTY TRICKS AND PUT ON AN ACT ..
..TO KEEP HIM AWAY FROM ME
ASSUMING THAT...
...JUST HYPOTHETI-CALLY...
..THINGS HAD WORKED OUT DIFFER-ENTLY..
..AND IT HAD BEEN LIKE RENZO WISHED FOR ..
..THEN SHIRA WOULD BE SIDE BY SIDE WITH HIM NOW, I GUESS.

IF SHIRA WAS STILL ALIVE THEN RENZO MIGHT HAVE EXPERIENCED WORSE THINGS.

EH?!
I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT CRUEL THINGS HE WOULD HAVE DONE TO THE BOY.
I KNOW.


BUT SHIRA WAS..
...A STRAIGHT PERSON.


IF SHIRA HAD BEEN BEEN A BIT MORE POWERFUL..
...IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THE OUTCOME RENZO HOPED FOR.
NOT AS RANDOM AS ME..

ARE YOU TOTALLY CRAZY?!

AND IT WAS THREE AGAINST ONE.
YEAH, THAT TOO.
HE WAS AN IMMORTAL MONSTER INCAPABLE OF FEELING PAIN. THAT WAS HIS DOOM
AND IT WOULDN'T HAVE MATTERED IF SHIRA WAS STRONGER.
YEAH, YOU MIGHT BE RIGHT.
IF IT WAS LIKE WHAT RENZO WISHED FOR, THEN HIS FATHER WOULD BE AT HIS SIDE NOW.
I THINK YOU ARE FOOLING YOURSELF MORE THAN HIM.
RIN...
YOU ARE TALKING OF TRICKS AND ACTS...
...CAN'T BE TALKED OUT IN JUST ONE NIGHT.
ALL THE HATE OF A MAN THAT HAS LOST HIS FAMILY...

LIKE I DIDN'T HAVE ANY CHOICE BUT TO KILL SHIRA WHEN WE MET.
SO WHAT?
YOU COULDN'T HELP BUT KILL ARAYA KAWAKAMI IN THE END.

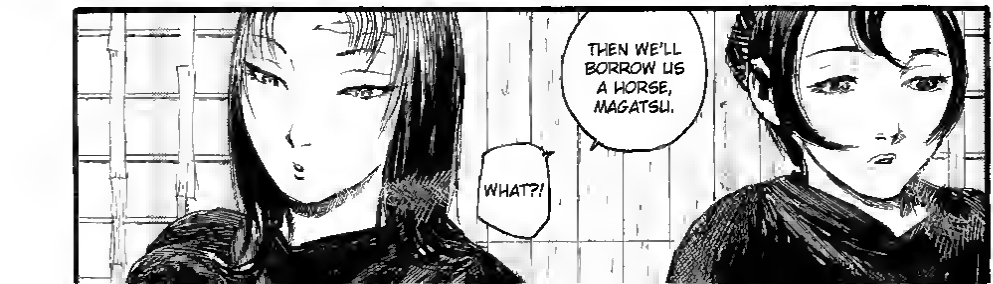
...TO BE HUNTED BY THE FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THE ONE WE KILLED FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES
THAT'S FATE.
ALL WE CAN DO IS BRACE OURSELVES...

YES...

IT IS PRESUMPTUOUS ..
...TO EVEN THINK ABOUT FORGIVENESS.

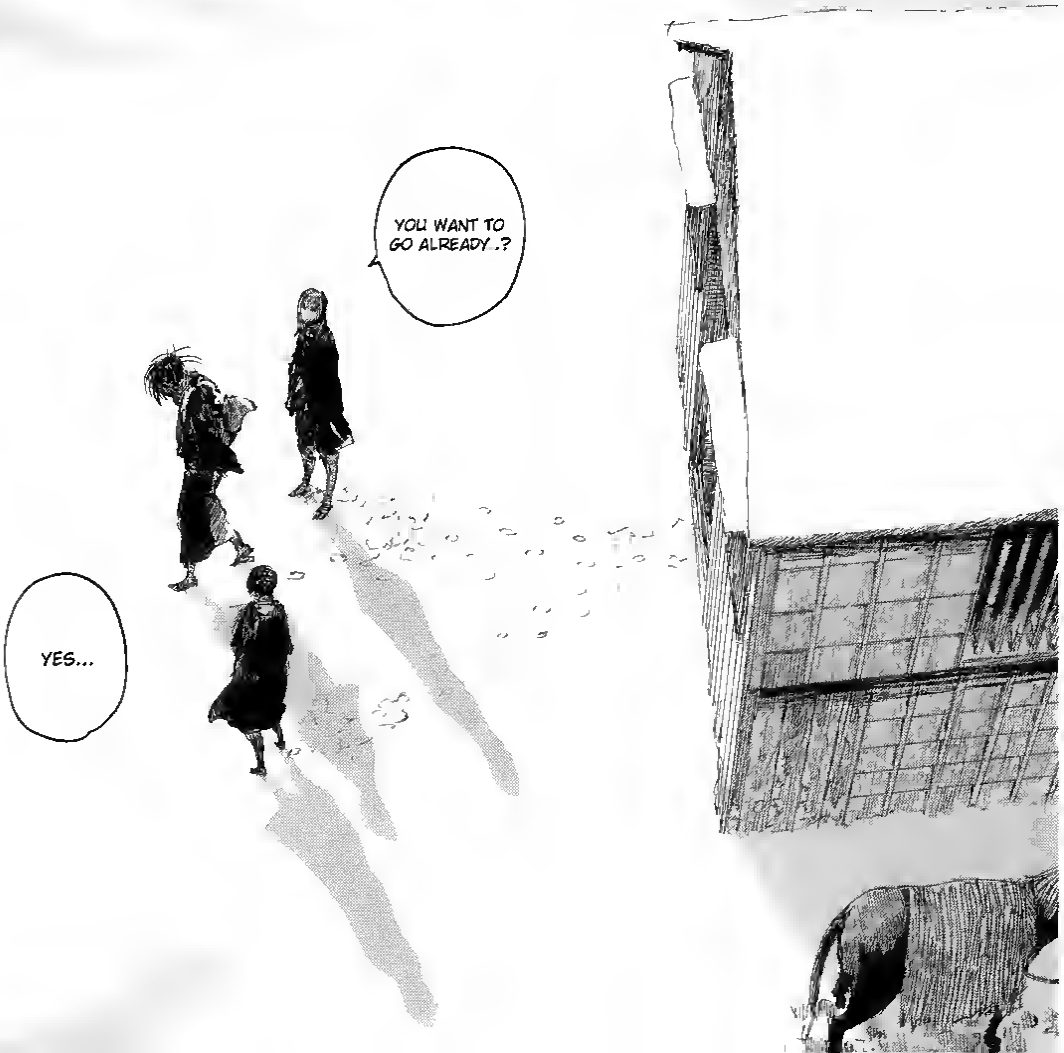
AH, WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MORNING!
Uhhh, it's cold!

SORRY, TANPOPO, MEGURO..!
OKAY!
WOULD YOU LOOK AFTER RENZO FROM NOW ON?

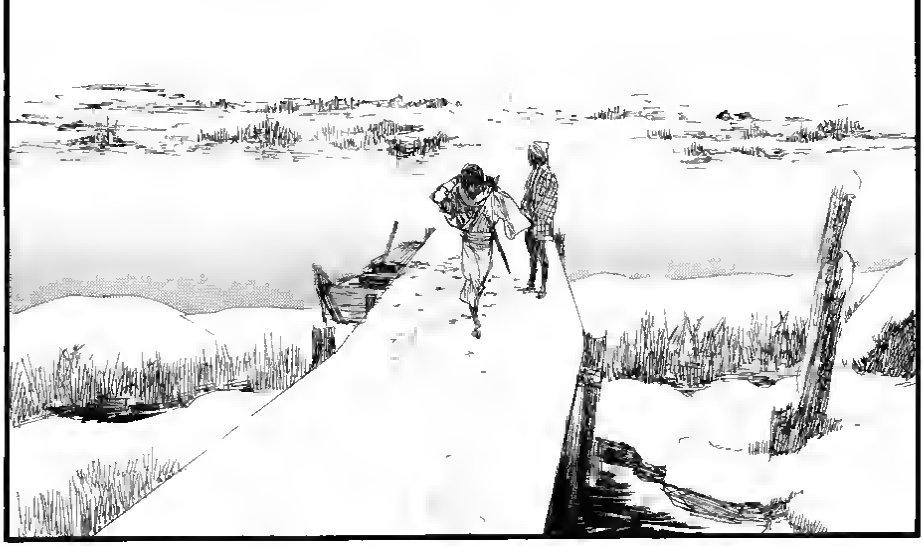

THEN WE'LL BORROW US A HORSE, MAGATSU.
WHAT?!

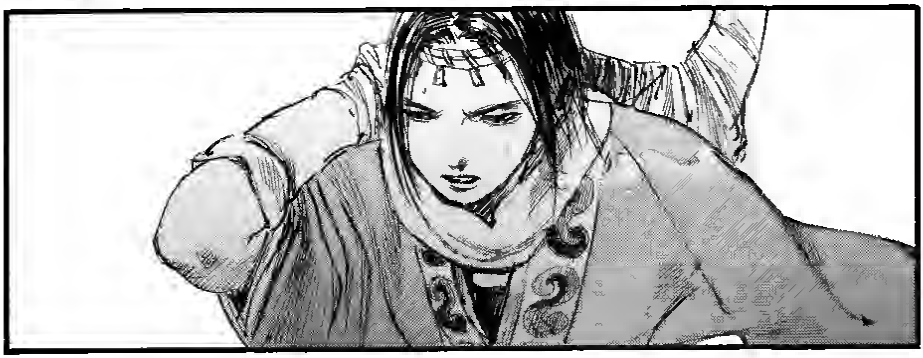
KAGEHISA ANOTSU HAS ORDERED US TO COME TO HITACHI AS SOON AS POSSIBLE..
I HAVE TO GET THERE FAST!
BULL-SHIT!
BUT I CAN'T STAY ABSENT FROM THE LAST BATTLE AS A LEADING MEMBER OF ITTO-RYU!
DON'T TELL ME YOU STILL REGARD YOURSELF AS A MEMBER OF ITTO-RYU?
YOU TOOK PART IN A FIGHT OF ONE AGAINST THREE, REMEMBER?
UNGH...
THAT GUY WAS IMMORTAL AND I WASN'T!
DOESN'T MATTER! YOU ARE WAY TOO NAIVE!
FURTHER-MORE... LOOK AT YOUR WOUNDS!
DO YOU THINK THAT THOSE ARE ALREADY HEALED? YOU'LL HAVE TO SEE A DOCTOR OR YOU WILL LOSE SOME LIMBS!
A WRECK LIKE YOU WOULD ONLY BE A BURDEN TO ANOTSU!
KCH!
YES, UNDER-STOOD! YOU SON OF A BITCH!
IN FACT I ONLY HAVE TO GET ME A HORSE AT THE NEXT POSTAL STATION.
BAH! CAN'T BELIEVE YOU'LL GET AWAY SCOT FREE...

ガラ?


YOU WANT TO GO ALREADY..?
YES...

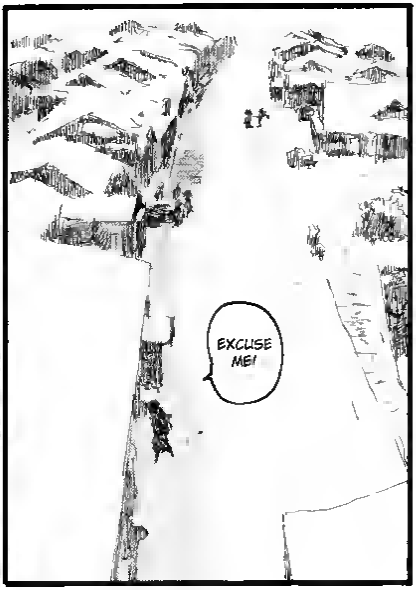
FURTHER-MORE...
...IF THERE'S SOMETHING SHE CAN'T BEAR, THEN IT'S CONSIDER-ATENESS.
HER HEALING CAN TAKE LONGER.
SHE DOESN'T NEED TO WIELD A SWORD IN HITACHI.
RIN'S FROSTBITE HASN'T HEALED YET.
WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER TO WAIT UNTIL SHE CAN WALK AGAIN..?
THAT'S HER ONLY CERTITUDE.
SHE'S THE ONE WHO WANTS TO HUNT DOWN ANOTSU UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD.
YES...





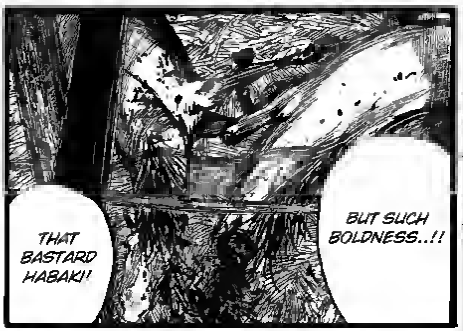
WELL, YOU KNOW...

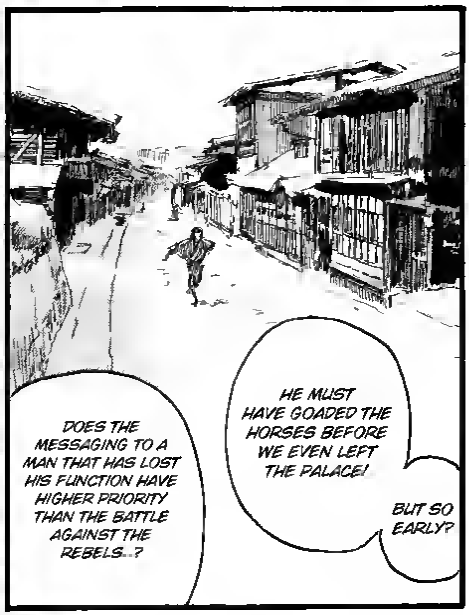
SOSUKE ABAYAMA HAS RESERVED SOME HORSES...
OH...

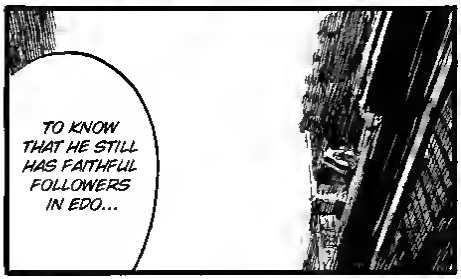

EXCUSE ME!

AN HOUR AGO, A SAMURAI CAME...
HE SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL COMPENSATE ME.
HE ONLY SPARED ONE HORSE AND RODE AWAY.
.....
DAMN..!
!!

...KAGIMURA HABAKI WOULD LEARN ABOUT OUR ASSAULT ON THE PALACE EVENTUALLY.
I KNEW THAT...


THAT BASTARD HABAKI!
BUT SUCH BOLDNESS..!!


DOES THE MESSAGING TO A MAN THAT HAS LOST HIS FUNCTION HAVE HIGHER PRIORITY THAN THE BATTLE AGAINST THE REBELS...?
HE MUST HAVE GOADED THE HORSES BEFORE WE EVEN LEFT THE PALACE!
BUT SO EARLY?


TO KNOW THAT HE STILL HAS FAITHFUL FOLLOWERS IN EDO...

HANG IN THERE, ABAYAMA-DONO!

AN OBSERVATION BY HORSE .?
WE ARE BEING FOLLOWED THE HORSEMAN THERE..

FROM THEIR POSITION...
I DOUBT THAT.

CAN'T THEY AFFORD NINJAS ANYMORE?

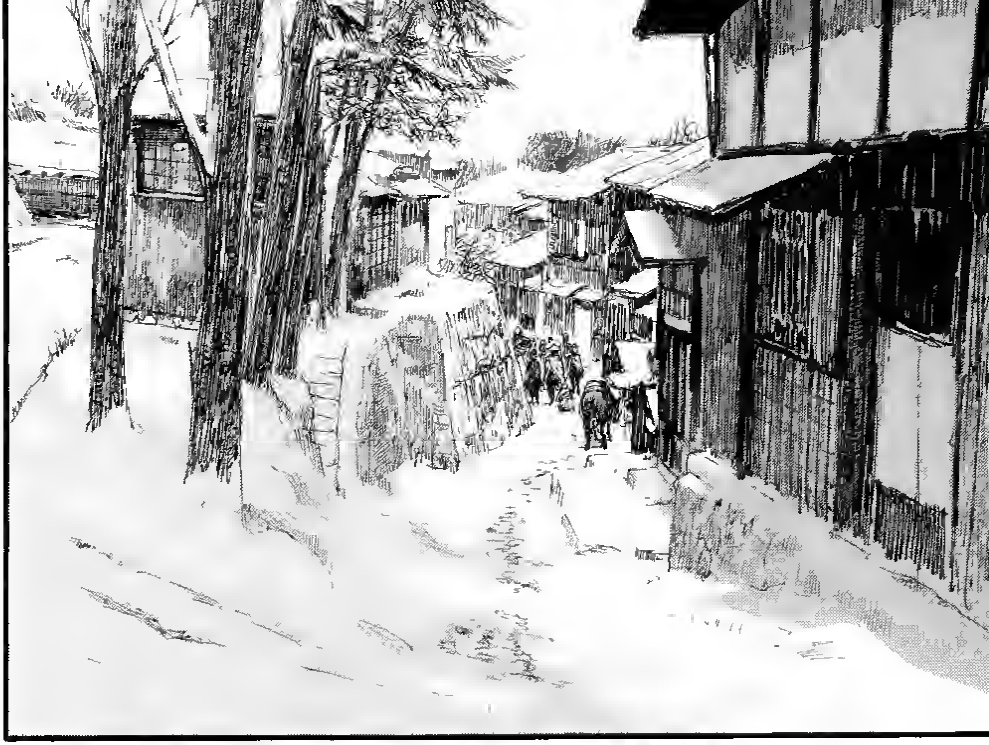
THEY WANT TO KILL US ALL IN THE END ANYWAY.

IF WE'RE FOUND OUT BEING OBSERVED DOESN'T MATTER.
...IT'S ENOUGH TO KNOW OUR NUMBERS AND WHERE WE ARE GOING

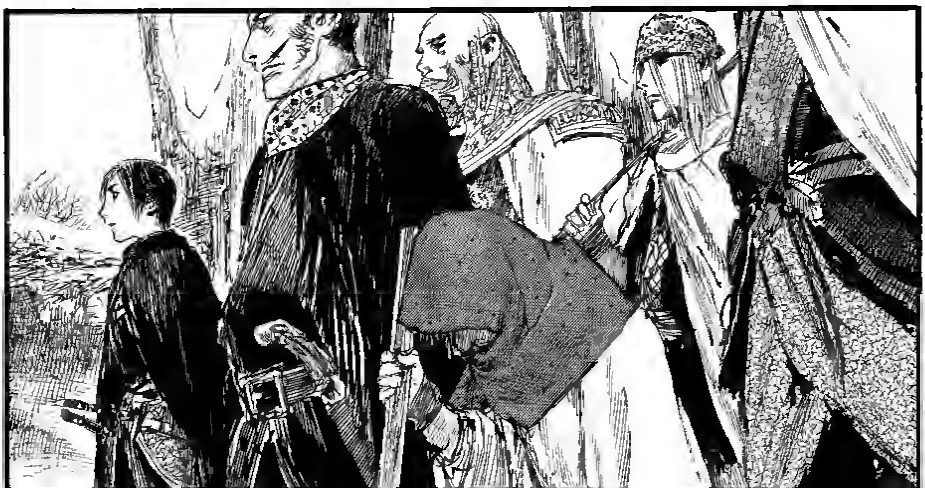
ITTO-RYU HAS TWELVE FIGHTERS AND ROKKI-DAN PROBABLY ABOUT THIRTY.
YES.
ABAYAMA-DONO...
...SHOULD WE CHANGE TO THE DISCUSSED METHODS?
IF WE WANNA DO THAT...
WE HAVE TO REDUCE THEIR NUMBERS SOMEHOW OR IT WILL GET TOUGH.
. . THEN WE SHOULD USE THE CHANCE THAT THEY'RE OBSERVING US.
RIGHT.

WHAT IS THAT..?
ABAYAMA-SAMA .
HM?
WHERE IS KOJI GOING TO ALONE?
ONE OF THEM IS LEAVING THE GROUP. ?

KOJI'S HOME IS THERE.
AT THE SOUTHERN END OF THE TSUKUBA MOUNTAIN IS A SMALL HAMLET.
THE OLD MAN WILL GO HUNTING THERE, JUST LIKE SOMEONE WHO HAS GROWN UP IN THE MOUNTAINS CAN.
THAT ALSO APPLIES TO US...
EVERYONE CAUGHT UP IN THIS HUNT WILL BECOME HIS PREY.



WHAT? A SINGLE PERSON HAS LEFT THE GROUP?
HM?



MAYBE BECAUSE THEY HAVE SEEN OUR HORSEMAN..
IT COULD BE A TRAP!

I KNOW THAT.
BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER. BOTH SIDES ARE ITTO-RYU.
BOTH ARE HUNTED AND KILLED!

I WILL GO.
IF IT'S A TRAP OR NOT, HOW-EVER..
HABAKI-SAMA...

HABAKI-SAMA!
BUT TAKE SOMEONE WITH YOU..!
YES.
.....
.....FOR A SNIPER WHO KILLS FROM FAR AWAY IT DOESN'T MATTER
I WILL GO WITH HIM!
GOOD, THEN YOU GO!
THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

FUKADA, ISHIHARA, HIRAYAMA AND ABIRU OF THE HEBIGUMI!
YOU WILL ACCOM-PANY THE TWO OF THE HANA-GUMI!
THE REST OF YOU WILL CHASE THE MAIN GROUP ON THE MITO-PATH!

MASTER KASHIN..?!
.....!

AH, IT'S YOU MUSUKE!
WELL, IS YOUR FATHER STILL ALIVE?
Y-YES, THANKS FOR ASKING!

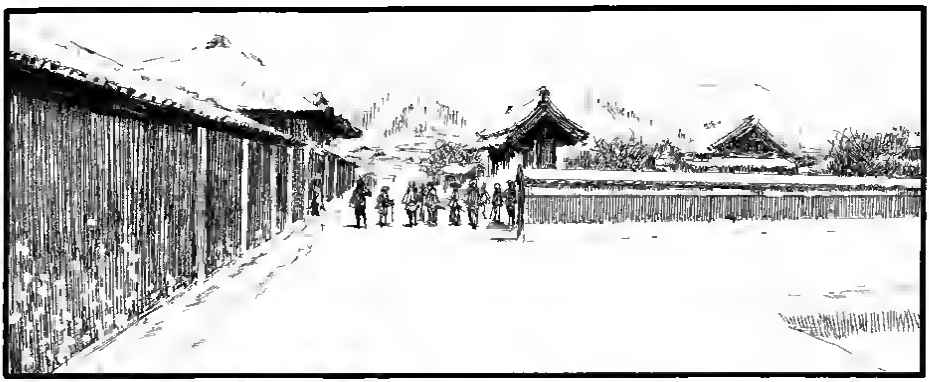
WE'LL OPEN THE POTS. PREPARE EVERYTHING RIGHT AWAY!

YOU ARE HABARAKI'S DAUGHTER, RIGHT..!?
YES, WHY?
YOUR FATHER IS KINDA WEIRD.
USUALLY YOU WOULDN'T SEND YOUR DAUGHTER INTO A POSSIBLE TRAP.

NOW I'M VERY HAPPY.
I REGARD THAT AS A PROOF OF HIS TRUST IN ME.
I HAVE BEGGED HIM TO TREAT ME LIKE THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HANAGUMI.
BAN-SAN!
HIS LOVE AS A FATHER IS REALLY REMARKABLE IF HE ACTS LIKE THAT WITH KAGEHISA ANOTSU BEFORE HIS EYES
WHY DO YOU THINK THAT?
OF COURSE IT'S POSSIBLE BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN THAT...
I UNDERSTAND. OKAY...
DO YOU WANT TO INSULT MY FATHER?

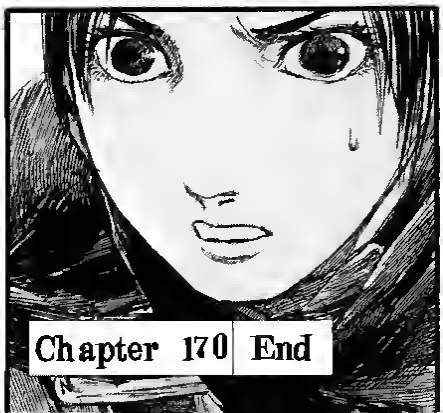
WHAT WAS THAT GLANCE..?
TSS! FATHER STAYS FATHER AND DAUGHTER STAYS DAUGHTER..
BAN-SAN! LOOK!
!
There's no ambush here...
HE DOESN'T SEEM TO HAVE NOTICED US...
HM..? YOU MEAN THE PERSON STANDING THERE..?

WHAT'S THAT..?!
NO DOUBT, IT'S HIM..
HM? HEY...
Sketch of Tanpopo
Old man, name unknown



BUT HE WAS ALONE THE WHOLE TIME..!
DAMN IT! WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!
THERE WERE DIFFERENT MEN...
THAT'S THE MAIN GROUP!!

ONE, TWO...


Chapter 170 End

JUST DON'T GET ME LOST..!
SIX OF THEM, OH WELL...

Chapter 171:
Pots
-Part 1-

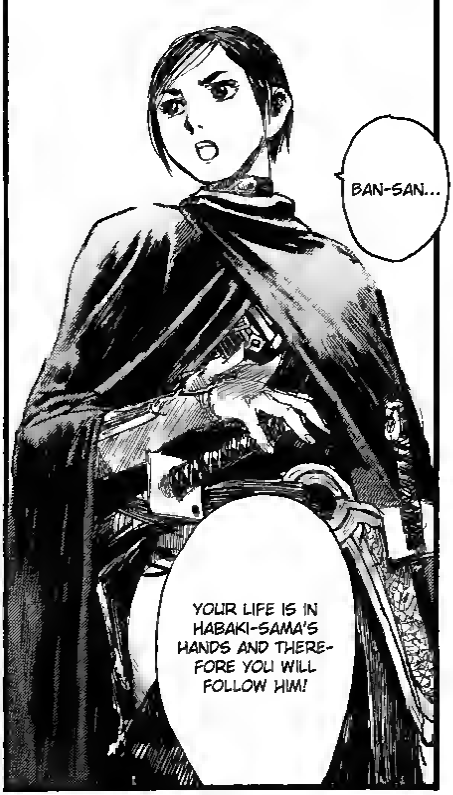
WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?!

IT'S MORE LIKE "INTO THE WOODS" THAN "UP THE MOUNTAIN".
THEY WALKED UP THE MOUNTAIN WHERE THERE'S NO PATH OR STEPS AT ALL!
BAN-SAN...
.. BUT IT WOULD BE FOOLISH JUST TO FOLLOW IT WITHOUT A PLAN!
THIS INVITATION SHOULD BE WELCOMED BY US...
WHY DO YOU THINK THAT?
MAYBE MOST OF THEM ARE JUST FAKE ITTO-RYU.

BUT THE PEOPLE HERE DIDN'T HAVE THE TIME TO INSTALL THOSE.
THEY INSTALLED SEVERAL DIFFERENT TYPES OF BOOBY TRAPS BY HANABUSAS COMMAND THERE, NETS, TRAP DOORS AND IRON JAWS.
THOSE ARE THE KIND OF TRAPS I CAN IMAGINE.
LET'S TAKE FUKIAGE IN THE PALACE OF EDO FOR AN EXAMPLE....
BUT THINK FURTHER BAN SAN' THE PEOPLE HERE ENTERED THIS GROUND FOR THE FIRST TIME... JUST AS WE DO.
I THINK SO AS WELL.
Why the cigar?
MIGHT HAVE BEEN DONE BY COMRADES HERE.
ONLY THE ONES WHO'VE SET UP THE TRAPS WOULD BE ABLE TO GO THROUGH THEM RISK-FREE.
...WHERE YOU CAN'T DISTINGUISH ANY GADGETS HIDDEN IN THE GROUND...
PLUS, THE SNOW...
EVEN IF COMRADES HAVE PUT UP TRAPS AND INFORMED THEM, WOULD THEY BE ABLE TO MOVE FREELY?

SUCH A TRAP SHOULDN'T BE A PROBLEM FOR US.
YOU DON'T NEED SPECIAL PREPARATION FOR THAT.
BUT THERE ARE SEVERAL OTHER POSSIBLE TRAPS SET UP HERE.
PERHAPS THEY WANT TO SURROUND US WITH NUMERICAL ADVANTAGE?
HEY..!
YOU ONLY FOUGHT ONE TIME AGAINST THIS ENEMY AND YOU ALREADY THINK THAT YOU KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT THEM .?!
...EVEN IF THEY OUTNUMBER US.
IF THEY AREN'T REAL ITTO-RYU THEN WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO FIGHT THEM BACK..
REAL ITTO-RYU.
.. WOULD NEVER USE SUCH A STRATEGY.

WHY SHOULD WE ENDANGER OUR LIVES TO HUNT DOWN FAKE ITTO-RYUS?
THEN, WHAT WE ARE DOING HERE DOESN'T MAKE MUCH SENSE
OKAY, LET'S ASSUME THESE GUYS ARE JUST STOOGES FOR THE TWELVE THAT ARE ON THE MITO-PATH...
...THE ITTO-RYU HAVE NINE PEOPLE LEFT. FOUR OF THEM HAVE ASSAULTED THE PALACE.
ACCOR-DING TO MITAKE...
THE OLD MAN IS AN ITTO-RYU WITHOUT DOUBT.
TSS!
ARE YOU SURE .?
HOW DO YOU KNOW THAT THE OLD MAN IS A REAL ONE?
THAT MEANS, OF THE GROUP OF ITTO-RYU ON THE MITO-PATH...
...HALF CONSISTED OF FAKES FROM THE BEGINNING
I DON'T KNOW IT!
BUT THE REASON WE ARE HERE IS CLEAR... TO KILL HIM!


BAN-SAN...
YOUR LIFE IS IN HABAKI-SAMA'S HANDS AND THEREFORE YOU WILL FOLLOW HIM!

GOOD.
YEAH, YEAH, UNDERSTOOD

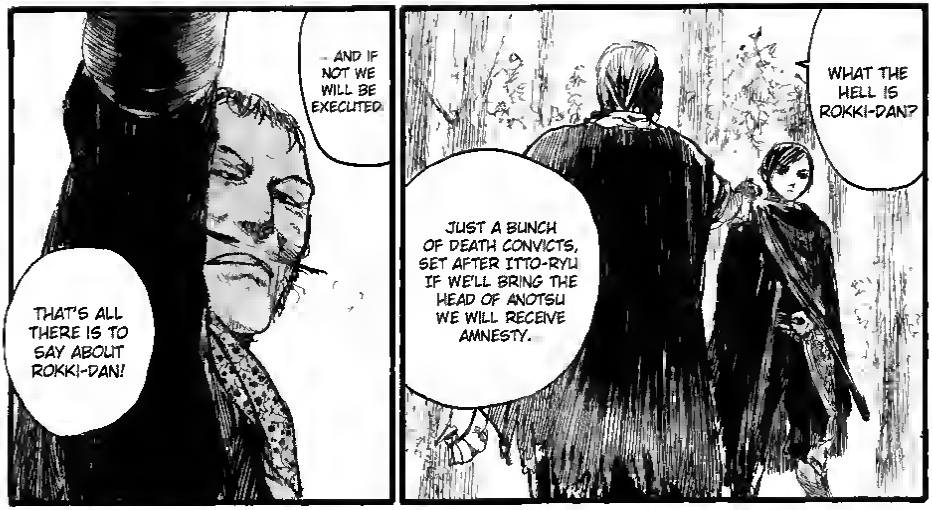
WHAT SHALL WE DO?
SPLIT UP AND STEP INTO THE TRAP BRAVELY?
WE'LL WALK IN A ROW.
THAT'LL MINIMIZE OUR LOSSES IN CASE OF AN AMBUSH

COME ON NOW!!
QUITE RANDOM
ROCK-SCISSOR-PAPER?
W-WHO'LL GO FIRST?
HEY, YOU'LL WALK UP FRONT!
WHAT?!
NO.
YOU'LL BE NEXT!
HII...
YOU DON'T WANT TO, OR YOU CAN'T
WE CAN'T LEAVE THAT TO A GIRL, C'MON, GO!
NO, BAN-SAN, AFTER YOU.
THE REAR GUARD IS ENDANGERED AS WELL.
I'LL DO THAT.

I SAID YOU SHOULD GO!
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO BE..?

FOR SOMEONE WHO VOLUNTARILY STEPPED FORWARD YOU ARE VERY HESITANT...
I UNDER-STAND...
HE HE...
I KNOW.
YOU PLANNED TO DEFECT FROM THE BEGINNING.
BUT YOU HAD TO BUTT IN!
THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO GO ALONE TOO!

FRANKLY SPEAKING, I CAN'T FOLLOW...
...YOUR FATHER ANYMORE.


WHAT THE HELL IS ROKKI-DAN?
JUST A BUNCH OF DEATH CONVICTS, SET AFTER ITTO-RYU IF WE'LL BRING THE HEAD OF ANOTSU WE WILL RECEIVE AMNESTY.
...AND IF NOT WE WILL BE EXECUTED.
THAT'S ALL THERE IS TO SAY ABOUT ROKKI-DAN!

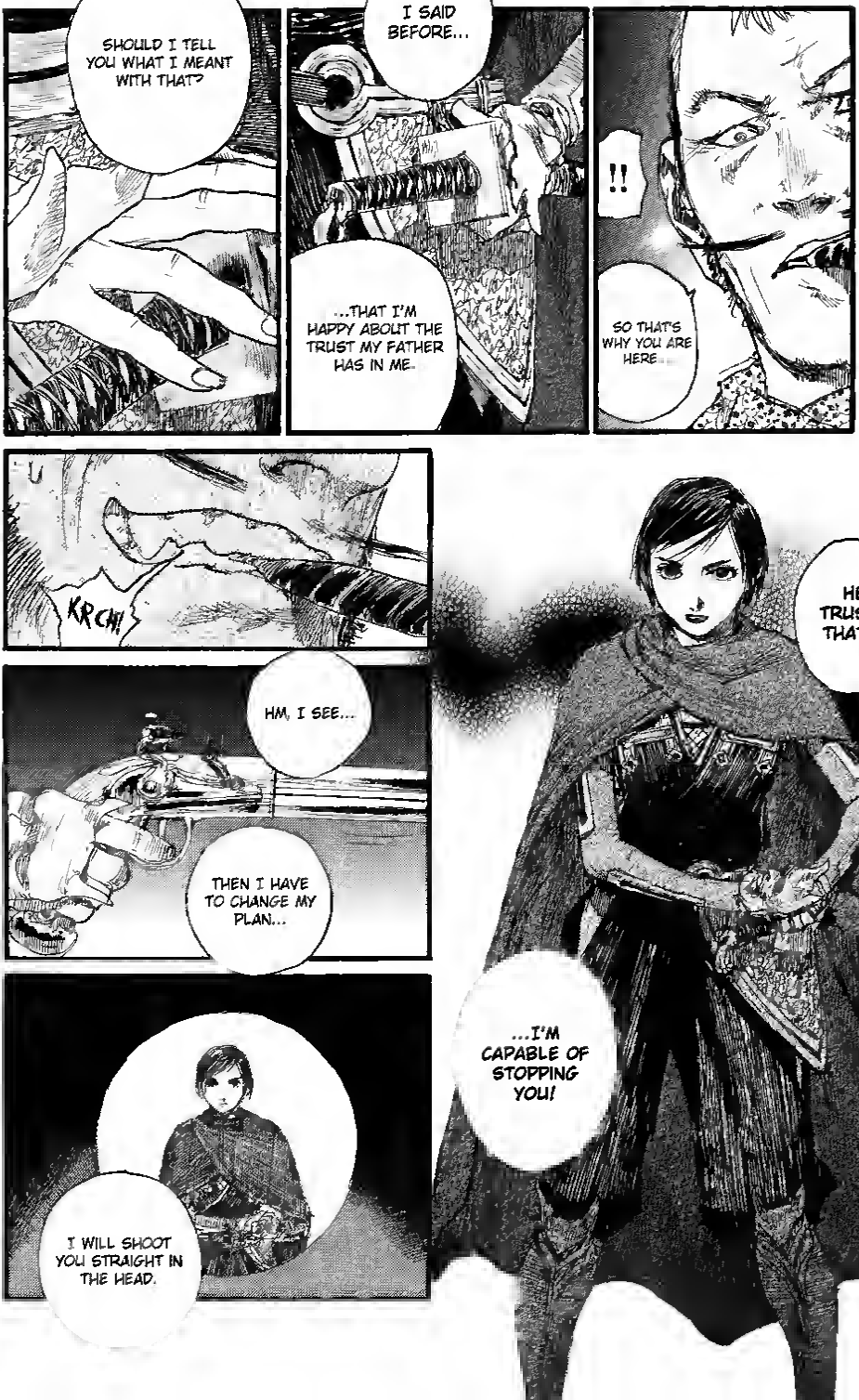
IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MANY ITTO-RYU WILL BE KILLED.
ONLY KAGEHISA ANOTSU MATTERS.
THOUGH HE'S NOT EVEN PART OF THE GROUP OF TWELVE ON THE MITO-PATH!
I THINK...
...WE SHOULD HAVE RE-VERSED...
...WHEN WE ENCOUNTERED MITAKE.

BUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO US?!
WHY DIDN'T WE JUST RETURN AFTER ANOTSU'S AMBUSH ON THE PALACE BECAME PUBLIC?
MAYBE HE JUST WANTS TO LET ANOTSU FEEL WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LOSE COMRADES WITHOUT BEING CAPABLE TO AVERT IT?
WHY IS IT MORE IMPORTANT TO KILL THOSE TWELVE?
EVEN IF ANOTSU WANTS TO...
WILL HE REALLY COME?
OR WILL ANOTSU MEET HIS COMRADES AGAIN AT ANY RATE..?
I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT KAGEHISA ANOTSU..
...BUT I'M CERTAIN THAT HE'LL COME.
OUR DEATH PENALTY WON'T CHANGE THAT!
..MAYBE HE WAS WOUNDED DURING THE AMBUSH?!
MAYBE HE DIED SOMEWHERE IN A ROADSIDE DITCH?

ALWAY TALKING "MY FATHER DID THIS AND THAT"..!
KCH! STUPID GIRL!
HABAKI-SAMA HAS MET ANOTSU FACE TO FACE. BECAUSE OF THAT EXPERIENCE HE HAS MADE HIS DECISION.
I COULDN'T REALIZE THIS IDEA IN EDO...
..BUT IT WON'T BE DIFFICULT TO DO THAT HERE.
I WILL SHOOT YOU IN THE LEG NOW.
I WILL PURSUE YOU!
NO CHANCE!
I WILL NOW TAKE FLIGHT.
BUT LET'S DROP THAT!
FORGET ABOUT THEM! THEY WILL KICK THE BUCKET HERE.
WHAT ABOUT THE HEBIGUMI GROUP?
I DON'T WANT TO KILL YOU UNNECESSARILY BUT THAT SHOULD BE TOLERABLE

AFTER ALL...
...YOU WON'T LEAVE THIS FOREST UNHARMED.
DON'T BE MAD AT ME, LITTLE GIRL!
PFF...
!?
WHAT'S SO FUNNY?!
HA HA HAHA HA..!
BWAH HAH...
...I'M JUST ADMIRING MY FATHER AGAIN.
OH...

!?
...HE PREDICTED THIS EXACT DEVELOPMENT.
YOU KNOW...
...IS SHISHIYA ARASHINO, WHO WON'T BE ABLE TO FLEE BECAUSE OF HIS APPEARANCE.
...THE ONLY ONE OF HANAGUMI THAT HAS MY FATHER'S TRUST...
TO TELL YOU THE TRUTH...
EITHER ARASHINO, MITAKE OR ME.
THAT'S WHY THERE SHOULD ALWAYS BE SOMEONE TO MONITOR OVER THE HANAGUMI AT SMALL CAMPAIGNS.


SHOULD I TELL YOU WHAT I MEANT WITH THAT?
I SAID BEFORE...
...THAT I'M HAPPY ABOUT THE TRUST MY FATHER HAS IN ME.
!!
SO THAT'S WHY YOU ARE HERE...
KRCH!
HM, I SEE...
THEN I HAVE TO CHANGE MY PLAN...
I WILL SHOOT YOU STRAIGHT IN THE HEAD.
HE TRUSTS THAT...
...I'M CAPABLE OF STOPPING YOU!

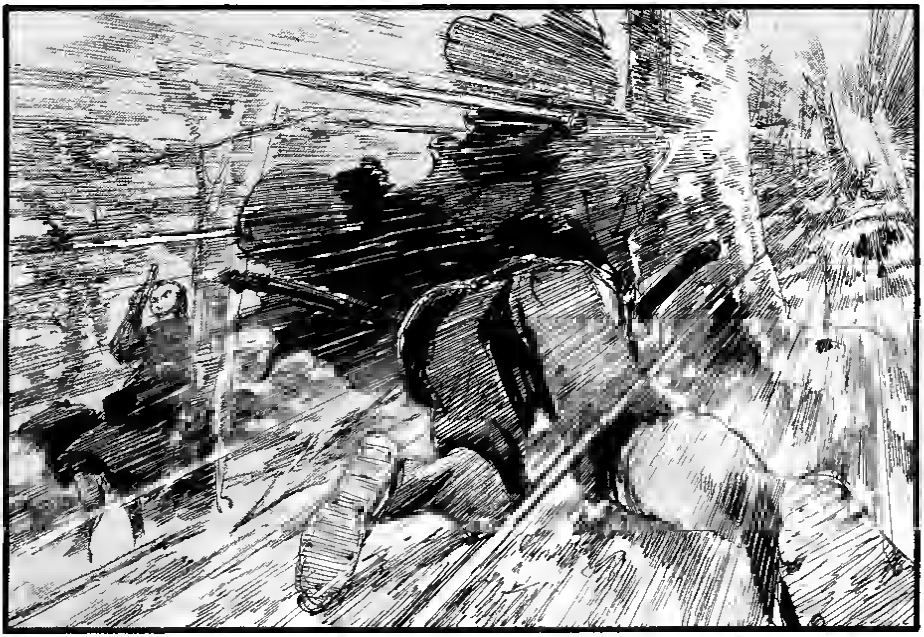
REGARDING GUNS...
...THERE'S ALWAYS THE DANGER OF GETTING KILLED FROM BEHIND.
UNDER THESE CIRCUM-STANCES...
...AND YOUR HANDS
...I CAN SEE YOUR EYES...
BUT FROM FACE TO FACE AT THIS DISTANCE...

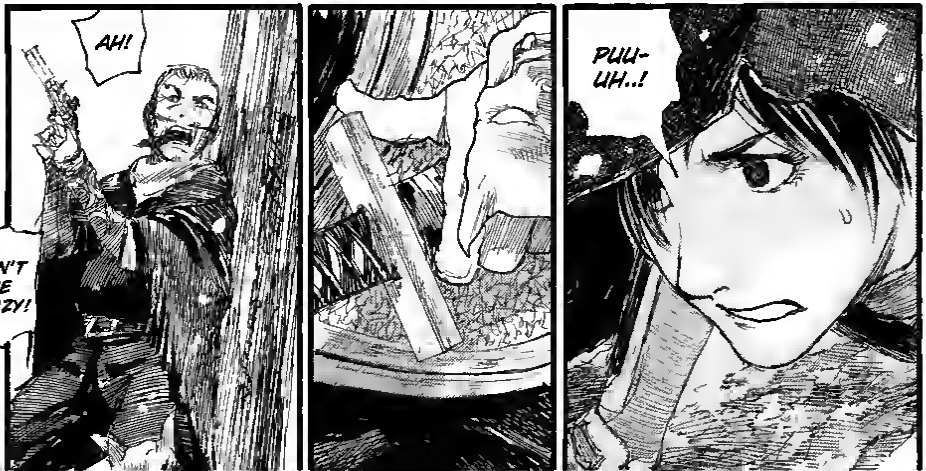
...I WILL BE ABLE TO KILL YOU.
YOU THINK SO..?

THE SCREAMS OF THE HE-BIGUMI..?
ARRGH!
UAA-AH!

DAMN. !

ぱか
WHY DID YOU..?
STUPID QUES-TION!
IF YOU ARE DEAD THEY WILL PICK UP ON ME!
DROP THERE, STUPID GIRL!




AH!
DON'T BE CRAZY!
PUU-UH..!

KCH..!
フォォォ

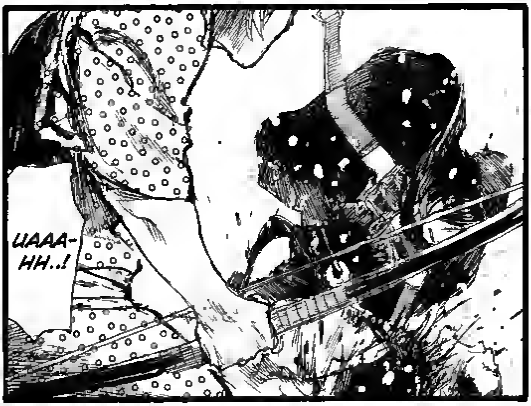
カヒュッ
INSANE..!
OH?!

WHAT..?

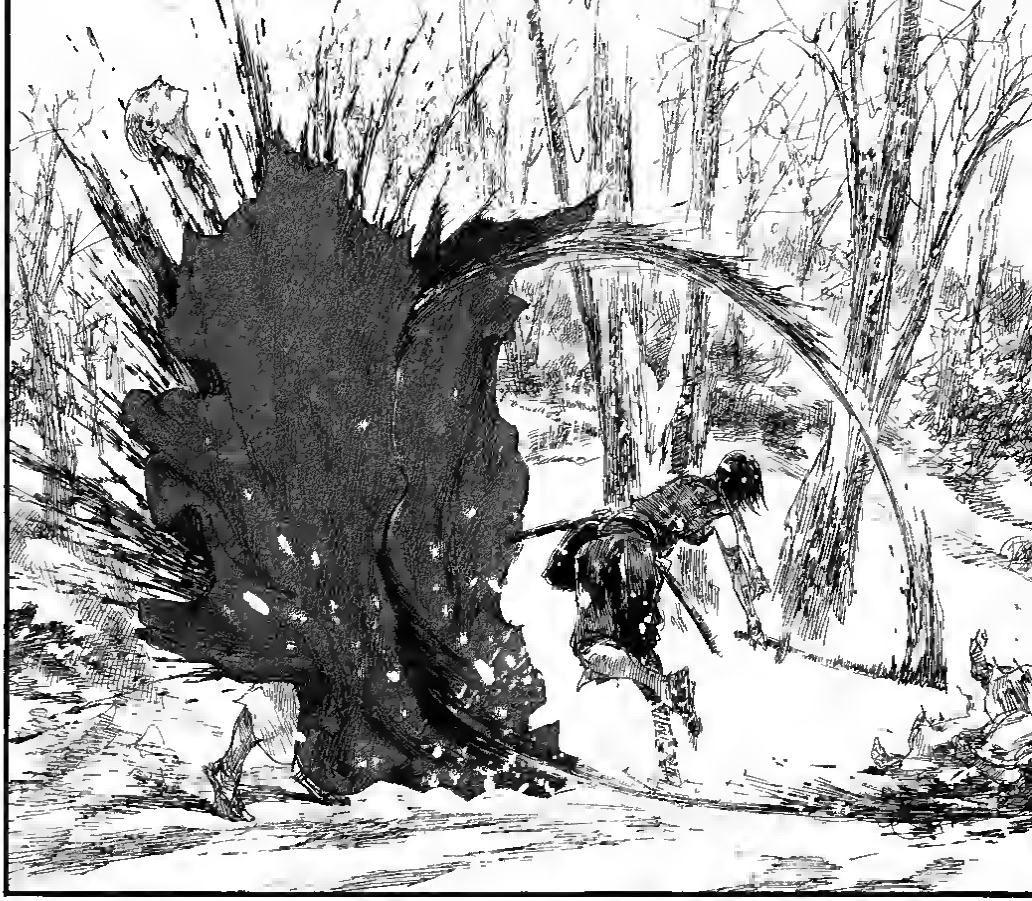
IMPOS-
SIBLE!
WHA
..?!

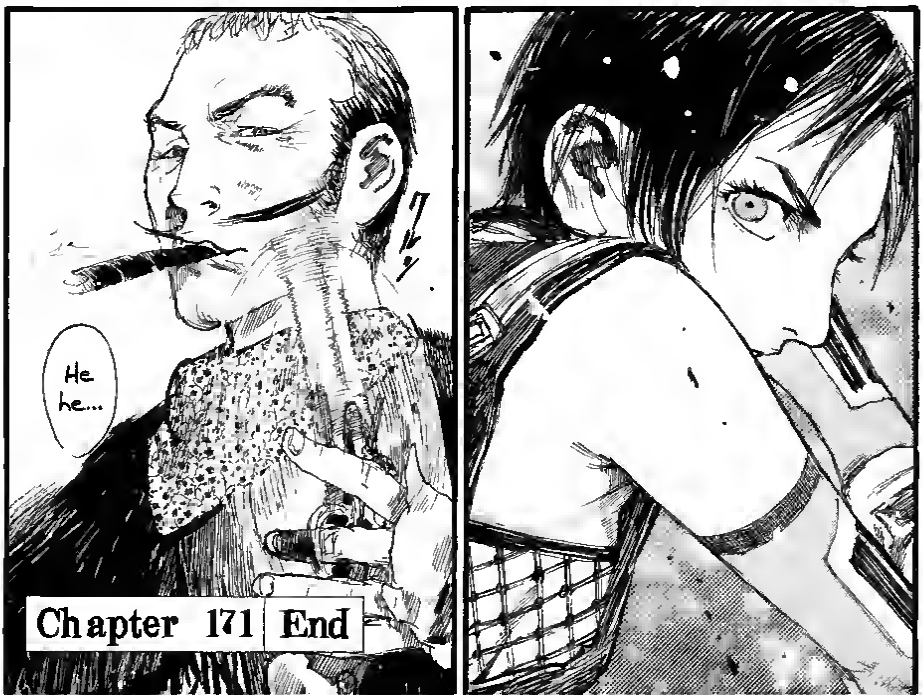
KYA
AAH!

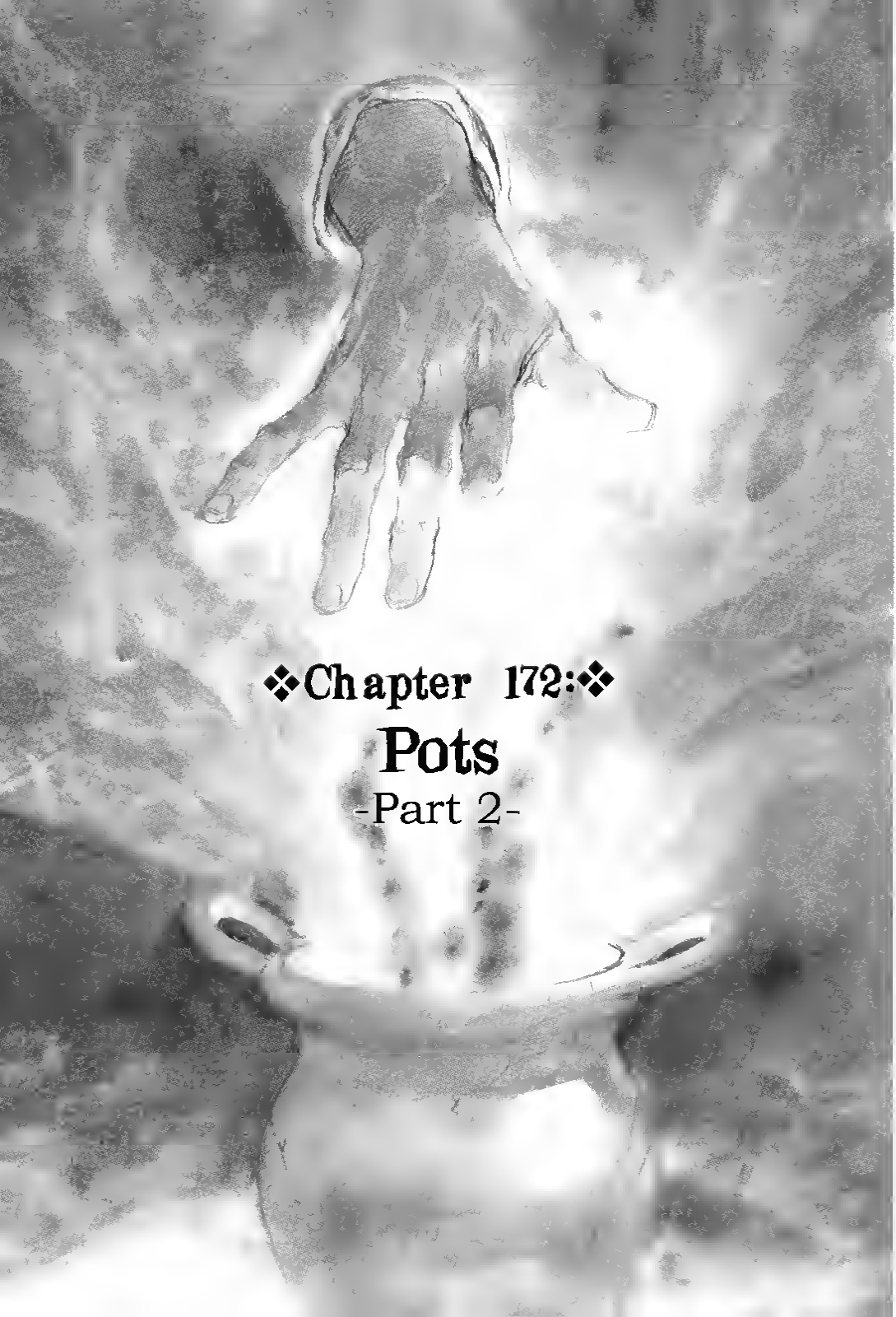
DAMN IT!


UAAA-HH..!

!?

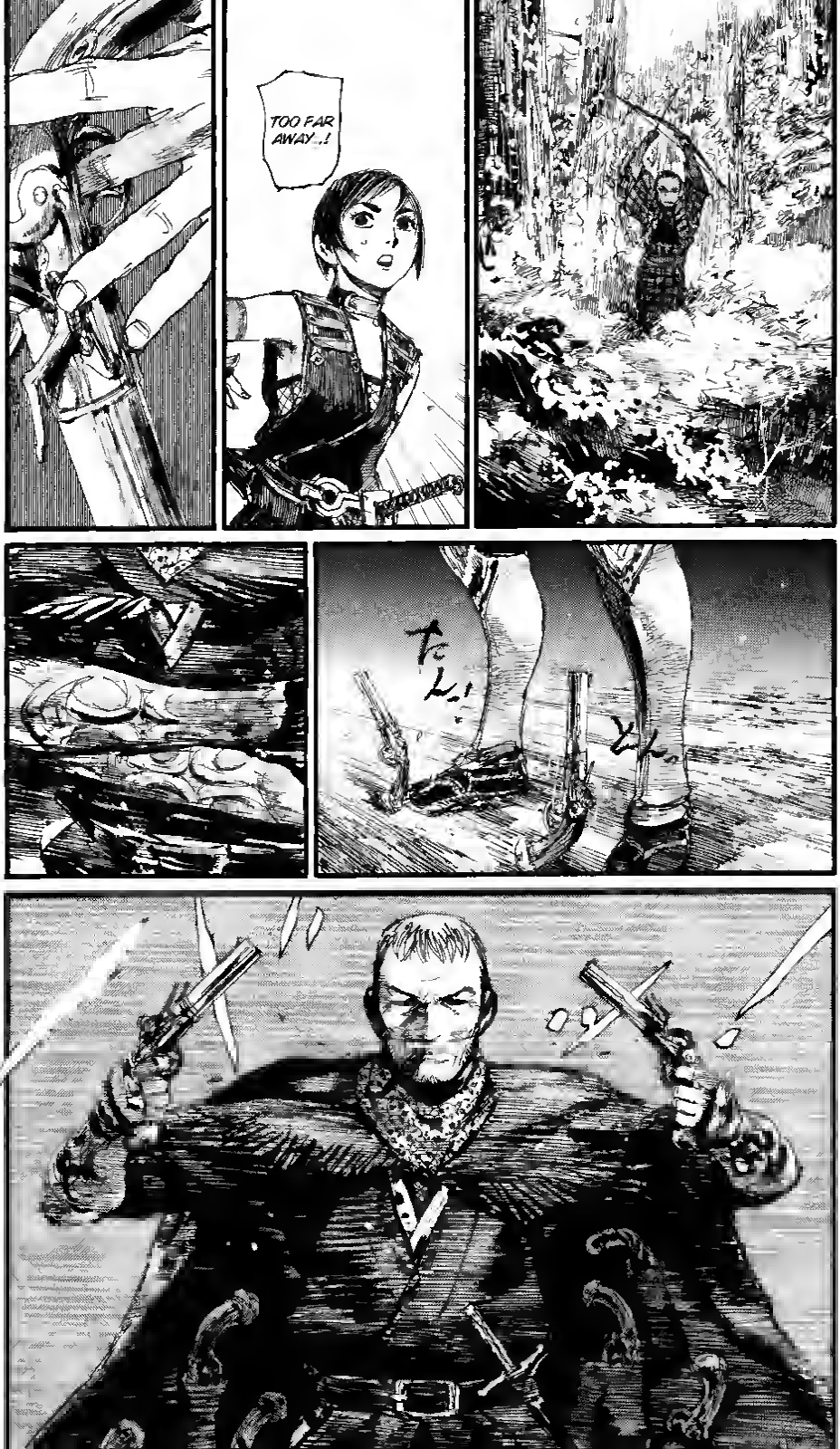



He he...
Chapter 171 End

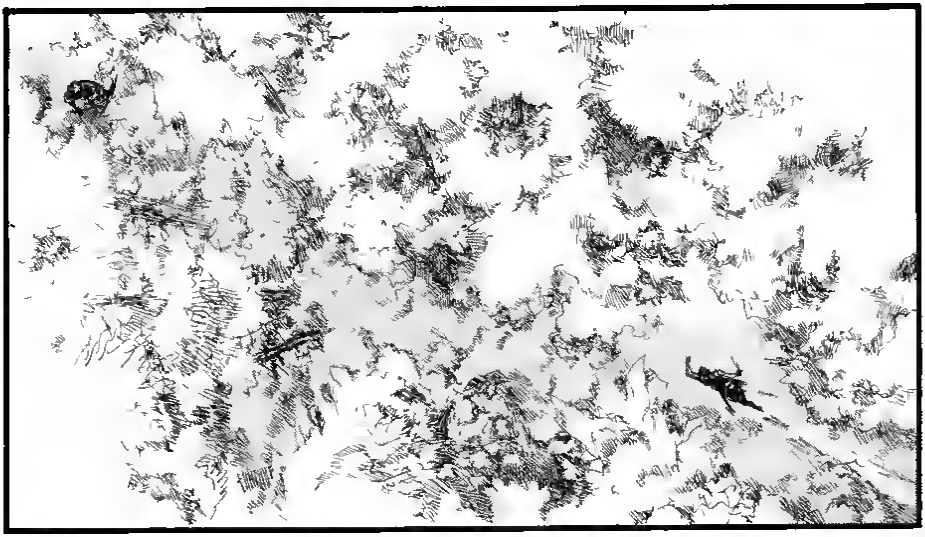


❖Chapter 172:❖
Pots
-Part 2-

THE NEXT ...


TOO FAR AWAY..!

ミシッ



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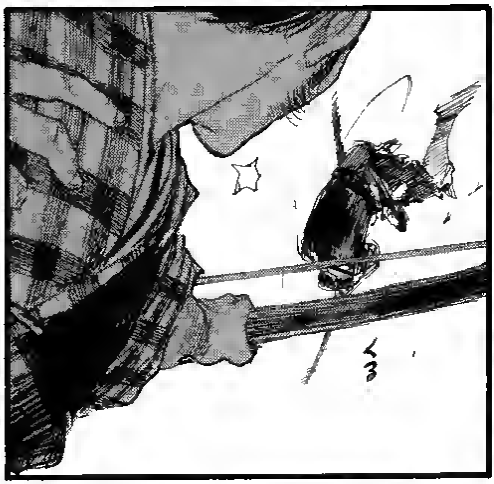
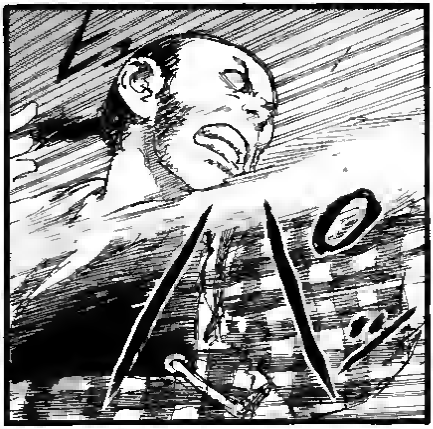
WHA..?
NO...
NO WAY!!

KYAAAAAAAAAAH!!





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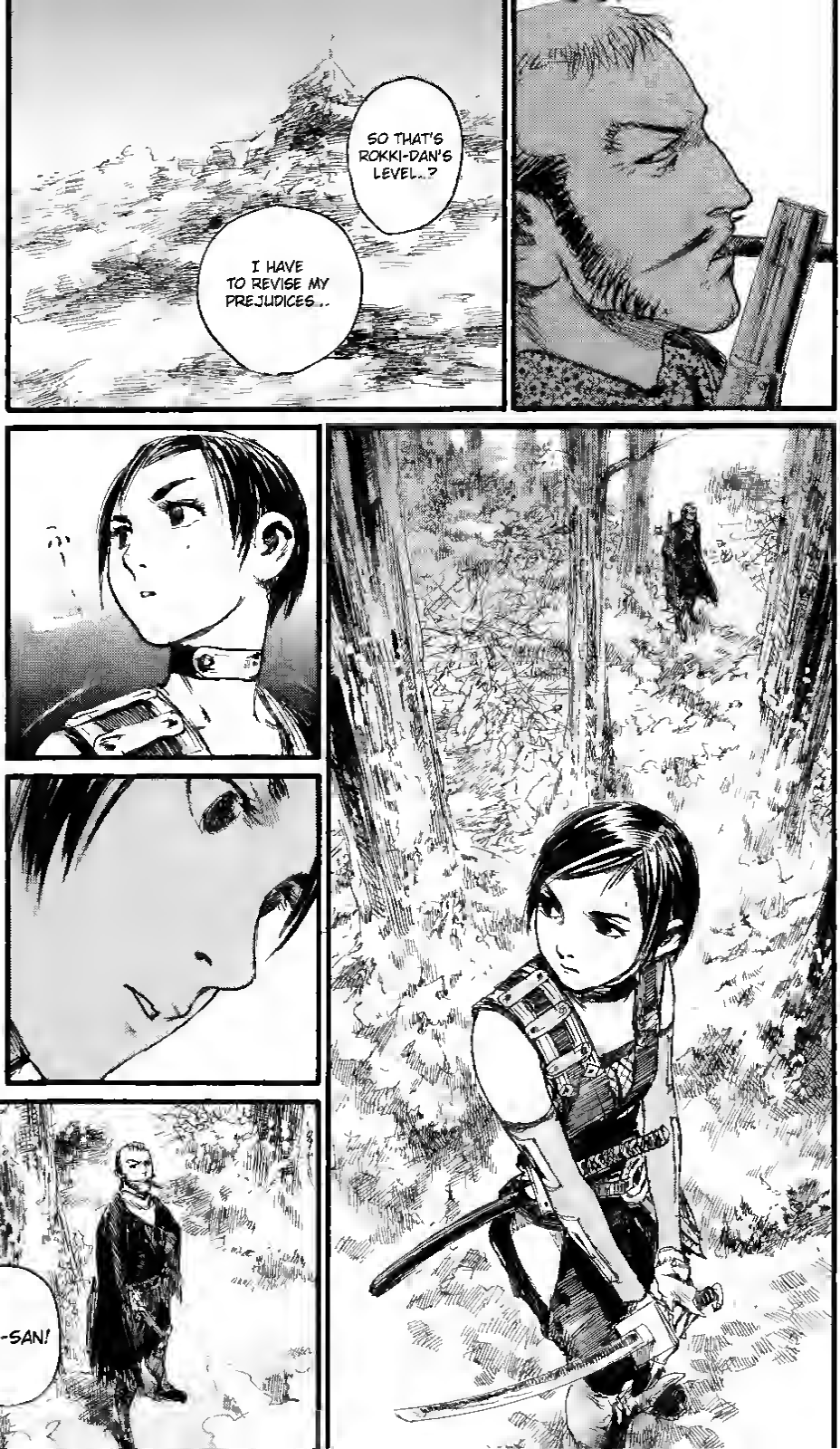
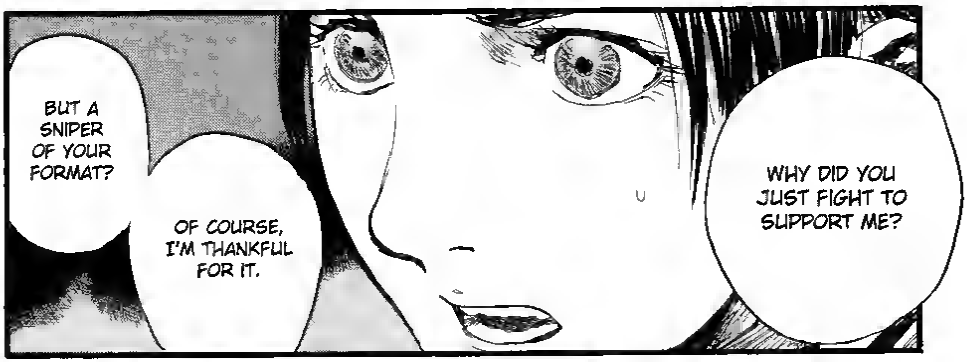
アー
AT LEAST I HAVE A MOMENT FOR RELOADING.
.....
NEXT ONE...

……
ずララ？
DON'T WORRY!
THERE'S NO ONE LEFT EXCEPT ME!
……!!

WHEN I SAW THAT YOU WERE FIVE...
...TO FIGHT WITH NUMEROUS ADVANTAGES
IT'S FROWNED UPON IN ITTO-RYU...
SO NUMERICALLY IT WAS FAIR...
...BUT I USE ALL DIRTY TRICKS THAT ARE AVAILABLE.
WHERE DOES THAT VOICE COME FROM ?
...I SENT BACK FIVE OF OUR TEN PEOPLE.
I DIDN'T EXPECT SUCH A DEVELOPMENT THOUGH.
THAT PISTOL SNIPER IS REALLY SOMETHING!
I'M REALLY SURPRISED TO HAVE LOST ALL MY COMRADES ALREADY.


SO THAT'S ROKKI-DAN'S LEVEL..?
I HAVE TO REVISE MY PREJUDICES..
BAN-SAN!

OH, I'M SORRY!
HEY, DON'T RUN WHERE TRAPS COULD BE!
OR IT WILL GET ME TOO!
I ONLY WANTED TO ASK YOU SOMETHING...


WHY DID YOU JUST FIGHT TO SUPPORT ME?
OF COURSE, I'M THANKFUL FOR IT.
BUT A SNIPER OF YOUR FORMAT?

OH, PLEASE EXCUSE MYSELF AGAIN!
BECAUSE A DUMB GIRL HAS TRIGGERED ALL THE TRAPS, THAT'S WHY!!
I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO AIM AT ENEMIES AT ALL!
ALONE HOW YOU KILLED THAT ARCHER...
WHY..?

HOW ARROGANT I WAS!
NOT BECAUSE HE WAS ASSURE THAT I'D BE ABLE TO DEFEAT HIM...
NOW I UNDERSTAND WHY MY FATHER ALLOWED ME TO WATCH OVER BAN...
MAY IT BE KINDHEART-EDNESS...
OR COWARDICE. I CAN'T TELL.
...BUT BECAUSE THIS PERSON WOULD NEVER KILL AN ALLY TO FLEE HIMSELF.
BAN-SAN!
EVEN NOW...
IF BAN WOULD BE SOMEONE WHO KILLS WITHOUT HESITATION...
...THEN HE WOULDN'T HAVE TALKED TO ME LIKE THAT BEFORE WE ENTERED THE FOREST.

I DON'T GET THIS GIRL...
MY ABILITIES...
PLEASE HELP ME...
I WANT TO APOLOGIZE TO YOU FOR MY WORDS.
...CAN'T MATCH WITH YOURS IN ANY WAY. I EXPERIENCED THAT DURING THIS FIGHT.
I'M NOT ABLE TO DO WITHOUT YOU!
...AND THE THREE ONES OF THE HEBIGUMI!
...WITH THE SEARCH AFTER THE LAST ITTO-RYU...
WE WILL SEE WHEN WE SUCCEED.
SO, WHEN THIS IS DONE I CAN GO?
.....

OKAY, HALF OF IT.
.....
I'LL HELP YOU PAYING THEM BACK FOR THE AMBUSH.
AGREED?
YOU CAN SEARCH FOR THE HEBIGUMI GUYS YOURSELF.
THEN WE'LL DO IT LIKE THIS...

WHAT'S WITH THE TRAPS?
DO YOU REALLY THINK IT'S ONLY ONE LEFT?
BUT HOW SHOULD WE PROCEED?
THIS TIME WE'LL SPLIT UP AND SEARCH IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. SINCE THERE'S ONLY ONE LEFT WE DON'T HAVE TO FEAR A BIG ATTACK.

IF ONE KEEPS HIS EYES ON THIS HEIGHT, HE WILL FIND THEM PROBABLY.
...IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME MECHANISM. STRINGS STRAINED IN 4 TO 5 SUN HIGH.

Note: 1 Sun is 3cm.

I'M EX-
HAUSTED, NO
WONDER..!
Huff...
AH!

.....
I'M SORRY!

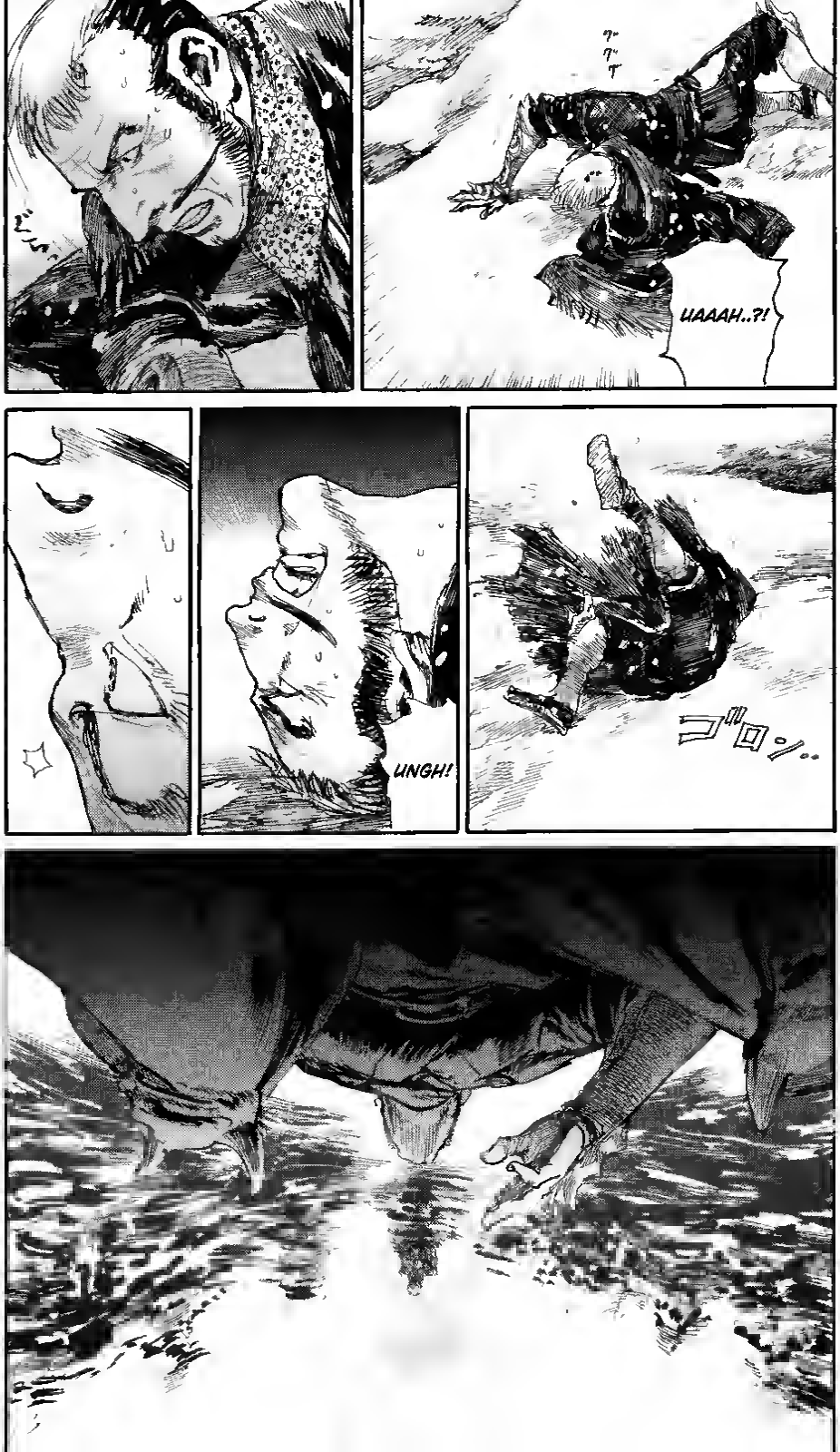
CUSTOM NEEDLES. ONE NEEDS A DEEP HIT AT A VITAL POINT TO KILL WITH IT.
NO POISON...
I CAN WIN AGAINST THIS

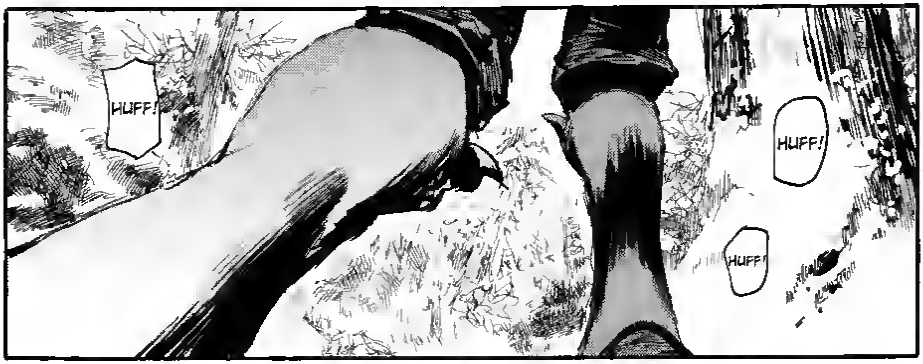
ふ、はあ――‥
I HAVE FOUND THEM!
BUT THEY ARE DEAD.

...INJURIES OUTSIDE.
THEY ARE ONLY TIED UP
NO...
WERE THEY ATTACKED WITH POISON..? BUT HOW..?
I DON'T SEE ANY STAINS ON THEIR CLOTHES. THEY NEITHER HAVE THROWN UP NOR RESISTED...

WHAT IS THAT?

吱
……
……
!?


UAAAH..?!
UNGH!
ゴロ…


HUFF!
HUFF!
HUFF!

HAA.
HAA ..
Chapter 172 End

❖Chapter 173❖

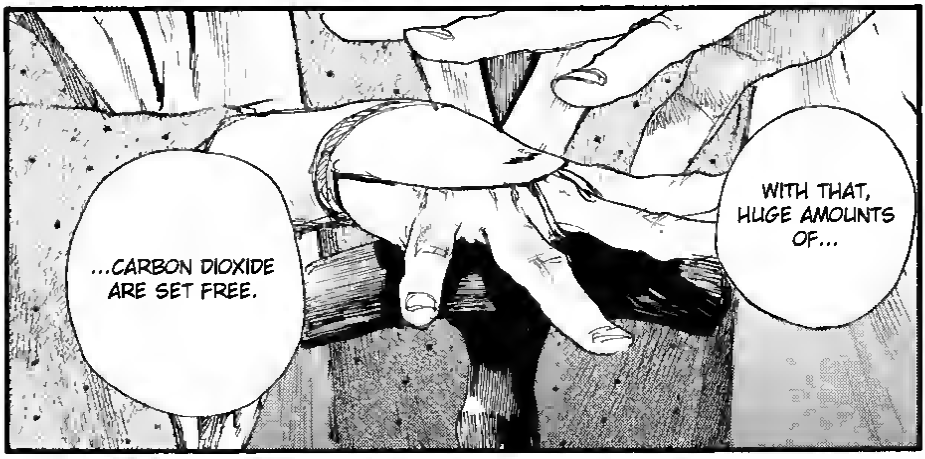
Pots

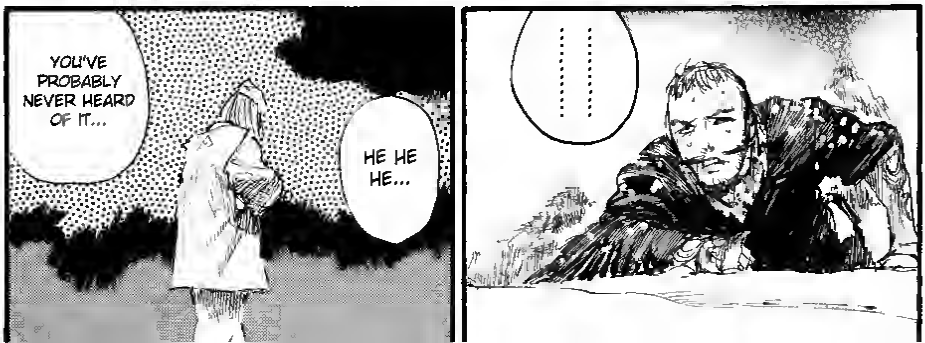
-Part 3-

……

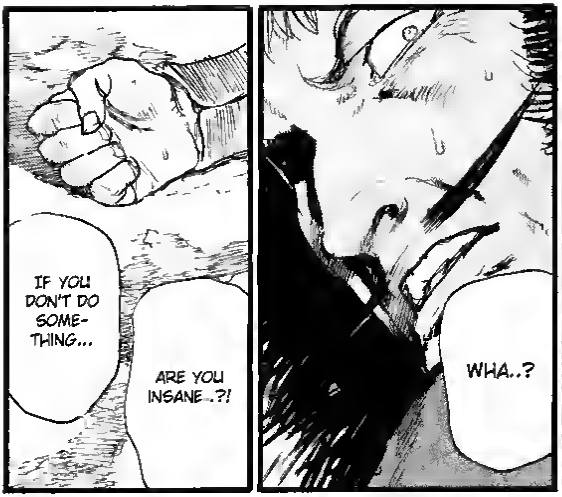
...FOR BREATHING IN!
THANK YOU...
JUST LIKE YOUR PISTOLS. THEY KEPT YOU TARDY
YOU KNOW... YOU REALLY ANNOYED ME.

O-OLD MAN...
WHAT IS... IN THE... POT..?!
WELL, WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?
SEA... SEA-SHELLS..?
CORRECT.
THE CLUE IS TO POUR NITRIC ACID OVER THEM.


WITH THAT, HUGE AMOUNTS OF...
...CARBON DIOXIDE ARE SET FREE.


.....
HE HE HE...
YOU'VE PROBABLY NEVER HEARD OF IT...

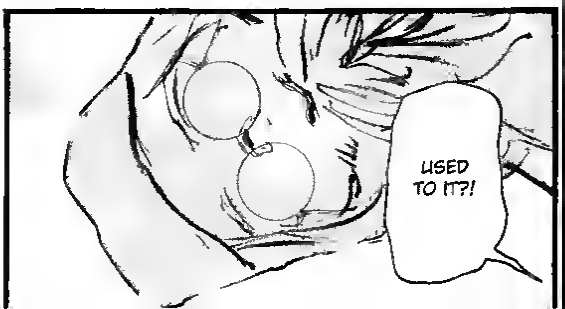
OF COURSE IT DOESN'T BOTHER US IN SUCH A LOW CONCENTRATION.
.. IS EVEN IN THE AIR WE BREATH EVERY DAY, THOUGH IN SMALL AMOUNTS.
BUT THIS SO CALLED CARBON DIOXIDE...
WE HAVE...
...PUT OUT FORTY POTS LIKE THAT HERE IN THE WHOLE FOREST.
THERE!
WHEN YOU OPEN THE LID, THE GAS COMES OUT.
THE AIR WE'RE CURRENTLY BREATHING IS FILLED WITH TWENTY PERCENT CARBON DIOXIDE.
YOU KNOW..
LOOK AT THEM AND YOU WILL UNDERSTAND.
...WHAT HAPPENS?


IF YOU DON'T DO SOME-THING...
ARE YOU INSANE..?!

WHA..?

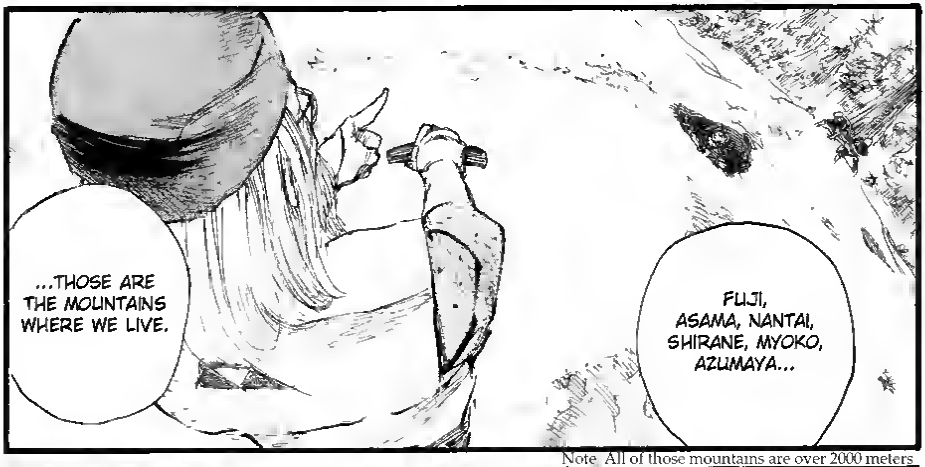
HO HO HO HO ..
...THEN YOU'LL BE AFFECTED AS WELL...

WE ARE USED TO IT.

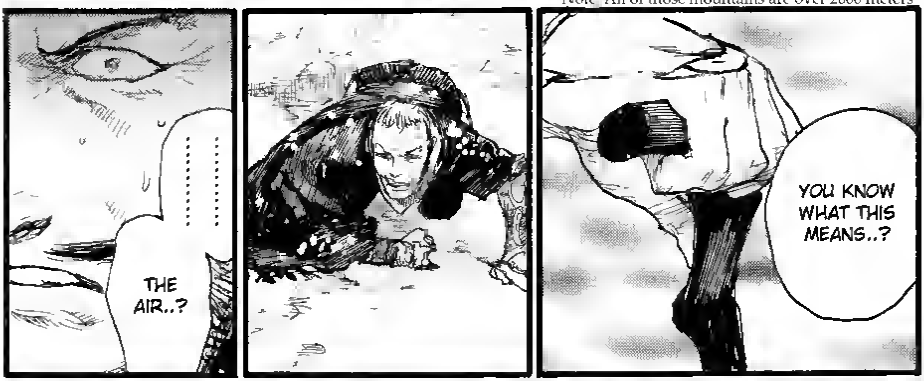

USED TO IT?!

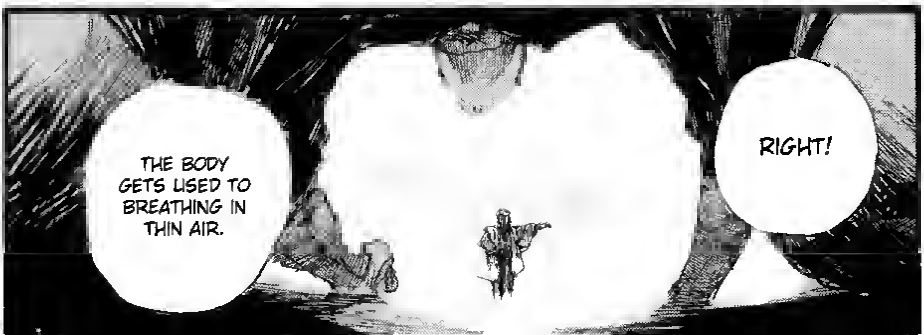
AFTER SOME TIME YOU GET HEADACHES, TINNITUS, DIZZINESS AND SICKNESS ..
AFTER A WHILE YOU CAN'T BREATH ANYMORE AND DIE

THE PEOPLE FROM THE HAMLET LIVE ONE-THIRD OF THE YEAR IN THEIR VILLAGE...
...AND THE OTHER TWO-THIRDS OF THE YEAR IN THE MOUNTAINS.
THEY ARE MOUNTAIN DWELLERS.
JUST LIKE ME.



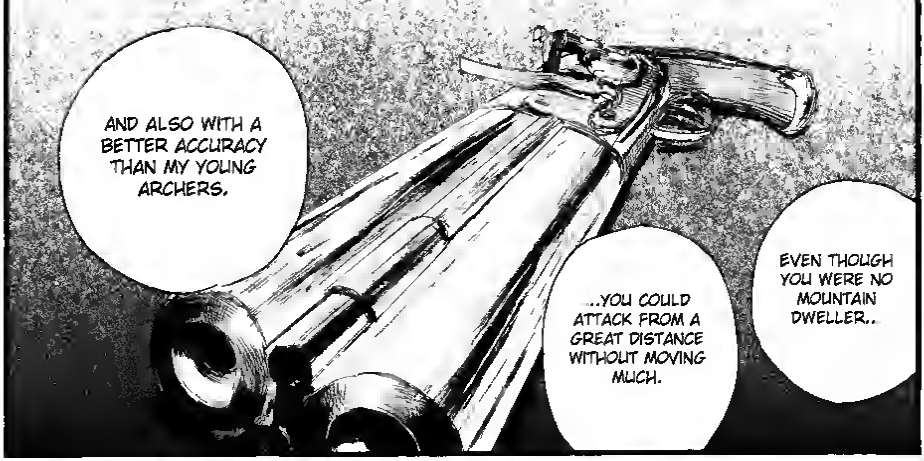
Note: All of those mountains are over 2000 meters

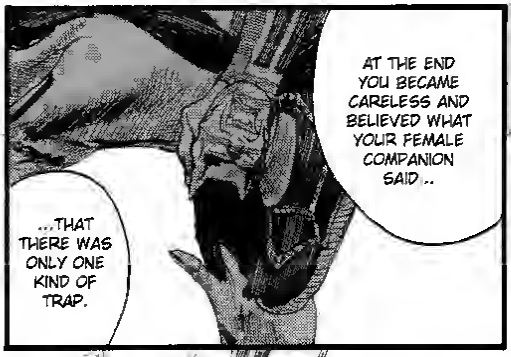


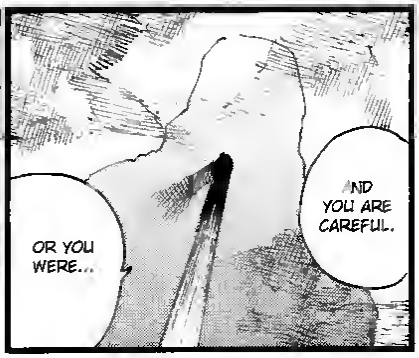


...I ONLY BREATHE ONE-THIRD OF THE AIR AN AVERAGE HUMAN DOES.
HERE IN THIS FOREST...
THE BREATH-ING..?
HA...
HA...
WELL, WELL...
YOU SHOULD REDUCE YOUR BREATHING TOO.
COUGH..! COUGH..!
I SEE...
AH...
OH MY! YOU ARE SMARTER THAN I THOUGHT!
...THE ARCHERS...
THAT'S WHY...

THE SECRET OF OUR "HUNT"...
...IS TO NOT MOVE.
IF YOU MOVE, YOU RAISE YOUR BREATHING.
THEREBY YOU BREATHE IN EVEN MORE CARBON DIOXIDE
OUR GOAL IS TO MOVE AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE...
...AND KEEP YOU MOVING.
THAT'S WHY WE LURED YOU DEEP INTO THE WOODS.
...BUT THEIR PURPOSE IS TO PETRIFY YOU.
THE BOOBY TRAPS SERVE THE SAME PURPOSE. IF THEY KILL YOU THEN IT'S ALRIGHT WITH US.
THEY SHOULD PUT YOU UNDER CONSTANT STRESS.
AND THE STRESS FORCES YOU TO BREATHE MORE AS WELL.
WELL?
DO YOU GET IT NOW WHY YOU WERE ANNOYING US?


AND ALSO WITH A BETTER ACCURACY THAN MY YOUNG ARCHERS.
...YOU COULD ATTACK FROM A GREAT DISTANCE WITHOUT MOVING MUCH.
EVEN THOUGH YOU WERE NO MOUNTAIN DWELLER..


AT THE END YOU BECAME CARELESS AND BELIEVED WHAT YOUR FEMALE COMPANION SAID ..
...THAT THERE WAS ONLY ONE KIND OF TRAP.

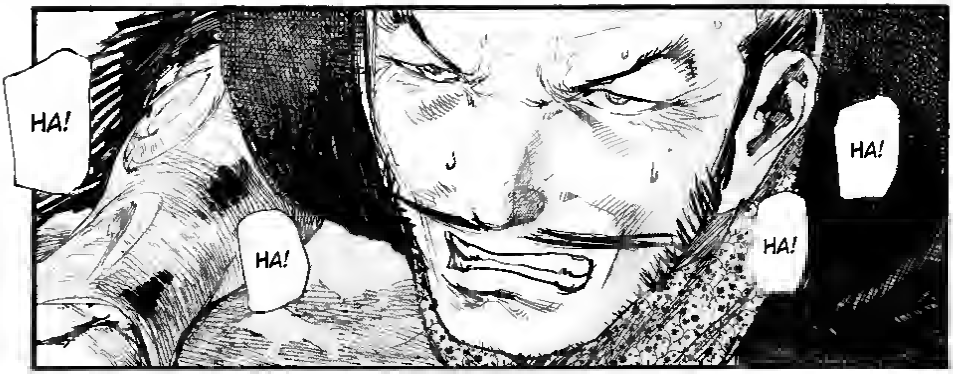

OR YOU WERE...
ND YOU ARE CAREFUL.

HO HO HO...
UNNGH...

IF YOU WEREN'T SO CURIOUS ABOUT THE POT...
...THEN I WOULDN'T STAND LIKE THIS BEFORE YOU.

I'M JUST A HEALER AND ONLY CARRY AROUND WHAT'S IN MY MEDICINE BOX.
BUT IF I CAN ASSIGN A TIME AND PLACE...
YOU HAVE TO KNOW ..
I'M NOT SUCH AN EXPERIENCED SWORDFIGHTER LIKE THE OTHERS OF ITTO-RYU, AND I'M NOT VERY STRONG EITHER.
...THEN I'M ASSURED I COULD KILL ALL OF ROKKI-DAN ALONE!
THEY ARE NOT POISONED.
THESE ARE ACU-PUNCTURE NEEDLES.

I WILL SHOW YOU A PRESSURE POINT WHICH WILL GIVE YOU A PAINLESS DEATH.


HA!
HA!
HA!
HA!

ヒソ…

WE'LL SEE...
YOU CAN'T AIM IN YOUR CONDITION.
LET IT BE!

HAH!
HAH!
HAH!
GWAH! FUCKING SHIT!!
UNNGH..!
WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT..!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE..!
HH!
HH!
HH!
HH!

BUT...
...YOU MISJUDGED.
YOU ARE NEITHER NARCOTIZED NOR NUMBED.
TO SHOOT YOUR OWN LEG TO GAIN BACK CONSCIOUS-NESS...
YOU PAY A HIGH PRIZE BUT IT'S ONLY A DROP IN THE BUCKET.
SHUT UP!!
JUST SHUT UP YOU OLD FART!!
I ONLY NEED A FEW SECONDS, NOTHING MORE.
I HAVE TO AIM AT YOUR HEART..
...AND PULL THE TRIGGER...

HIS COURAGE IS OUTSTANDING...
SO THIS IS ROKKI-DAN...
GO TO HELL!!

CRUSH
UNGH..
I ALWAYS MAKE SURE..
...TO HIDE MY NEEDLES IN A SPECIAL PLACE...
—SO I'M PROTECTED AT CERTAIN AREAS.
TO BE ABLE TO HIT...
...MY HEART IN HIS CONDITION..! ASTOUNDING!

...THIS ACCURACY WAS YOUR FAILURE.
EVEN SO...

HE'S DEAD.
BAN IS DEAD!
HAA!
HAA!
HUFF!
HUFF!
NO...
ALL DEAD...
THEY WERE ALL KILLED..?

IT CAN'T BE!
BY A SINGLE OLD MAN..!?
I HAVE TO WIN...
I HAVE TO DEFEAT HIM..!
UH, MY HEAD...
NEEDLES...
THINK, RYO!
THINK ABOUT IT!
IF HE THROWS THEN I'M DONE FOR..
BUT WITH REPEATED ATTACKS..
...I DON'T HAVE SOMETHING TO COUNTER.
I COULD PROTECT VITAL POINTS.
IF HE THROWS WITH NEEDLES...
..THEN I WON'T BE ABLE TO JUST DODGE THEM.

AAAAH...
DON'T LOSE CONSCIOUSNESS..! NO!
BUT THEN...
...WHAT SHOULD I DO?
ONE MOMENT OF CLARITY WILL DECIDE...
...OVER VICTORY OR DEFEAT.
I HAVE TO KILL THE OLD ONE WITHIN A SECOND!
UUUH, IT'S SO COLD!
MY HEAD HURTS LIKE HELL...
I HAVE TO BECOME AWAKE SOMEHOW!
I HAVE TO DO SOMETHING! I CAN'T WAIT LIKE AN IDIOT FOR DEATH!
LIKE A FORGOTTEN JIZO STATUE...

...WILL BE AWAKE FOR JUST ONE MOMENT LIKE BAN...
EVEN IF I...
IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.. I CAN'T DO IT...
ハァ ハァ

YEAH, RIGHT...
BAN HAD THE GUTS TO SHOOT HIS OWN LEG.
I'LL HAVE TO...
IF I DO...
STOP, WAIT! STUPID GIRL!
DON'T ACT HASTY..!
..STAB IT IN MY LEG.

BAN WAS A TOTALLY DIFFERENT FIGHTER THAN ME.
IN THE WORST CASE...
...HE WOULD HAVE BEEN ABLE TO KEEP ON WITHOUT HIS LEGS.
IF I STAB MYSELF...
...
...TO STRIKE DOWN SOMEONE WITH A SWORD.
BUT AS A FEMALE...
...I'LL NEED MY WHOLE BODY...
FOR EXAMPLE, THE EAR...
...THAT WON'T HINDER MY MOVEMENTS.
...THEN ONLY AT A POINT...
I COULD STAY AWAKE LIKE THAT. BUT...
HOW DUMB. THAT WON'T WORK..!

I CAN'T STAB MYSELF WHERE THE ENEMY CAN SEE IT!
...EVERY-ONE COULD SEE IT!
THE NEEDLE HAS TO GO THERE..
SOME-WHERE THE ENEMY CAN'T SEE...
...FROM MOVING...
...AND WON'T HINDER ME..
AS SOON AS I'M AWAKE I HAVE TO ACT...
NEEDLE..? WHAT NEEDLE..?
DARN, MY HEAD..!
PLEASE, STAY AWAKE...
I'LL HAVE TO GET HIM WITHIN RANGE OF MY SWORD OR I FAIL..
I'M NOT ABLE TO MOVE ANYMORE NOW.
..ME YET..!
DON'T LEAVE...

IT'S STILL TOO EARLY
THE POTS HAVE BEEN OPEN FOR AN HOUR NOW...

IT BECAME TROUBLESOME FOR ME...
IT'S NOT NICE GETTING OLD.
OR IS THE GIRL ALREADY DEAD..?
I HAVE TO END THIS QUICK.
I HAVE TO FIND HER...
!

HEY, WILD ONE!
YOU WILL SUFFER A CRUEL DEATH FOR THIS!
Chapter 173 End